

The Improvement Service

ELECTED MEMBER BRIEFING NOTE

# Local Child Poverty Action Reports



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# What is the purpose of the briefing note series?

The Improvement Service (IS) has developed an Elected Members Briefing Series to help elected members keep pace with key issues affecting local government.

Some briefing notes will be directly produced by IS staff but we will also make available material from as wide a range of public bodies, commentators and observers of public services as possible.

We will use the IS website and elected member e-bulletin to publicise and provide access to the briefing notes. All briefing notes in the series can be accessed at [www.improvementservice.org.uk/elected-member-guidance-and-briefings.html](http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/elected-member-guidance-and-briefings.html)

## About this briefing note

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017<sup>1</sup> sets out ambitious targets for the Scottish Government to significantly reduce child poverty in Scotland by 2030.

The Act also places a duty on local authorities to work together with health boards to develop, produce and deliver Local Child Poverty Action Reports (LCPARs). The reports are expected to represent a 'step change' in action to address child poverty locally, both describing the current excellent work underway in many areas and outlining plans for new and innovative efforts to tackle child poverty.

The purpose of this briefing is to raise awareness of this duty in advance of the first round of reports required by June 2019 and highlight the important contribution that local authorities and partners can make to the reduction of child poverty.

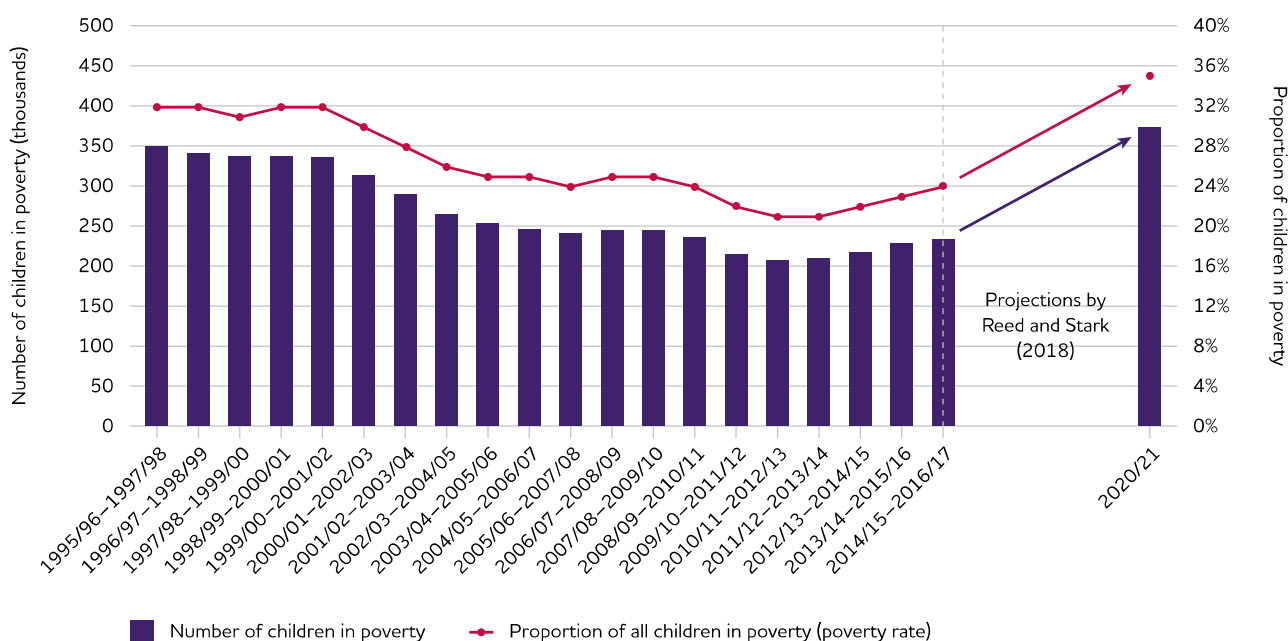
This briefing note has been jointly developed by the Improvement Service, which hosts the National Coordinator for Local Child Poverty Action Reports, NHS Health Scotland, COSLA, the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unity (SPIRU) and the Scottish Government. These organisations are working together to support local authorities and health boards in the development and delivery of their LCPARs, including engaging with all local authorities at officer level.

# What is the issue and why does it matter?

Almost one in four children in Scotland (24%) live in poverty<sup>2</sup> and seven out of ten of children living in poverty are in households where at least one adult is working.<sup>3</sup> While child poverty rates are much higher in some local authority areas than others, there is nowhere in Scotland completely free from child poverty. Indeed, 2013 figures show that every local authority contained at least one ward in which 1 in 10 children lived in poverty.<sup>4</sup>

Current levels are already much too high. But without significant policy change, child poverty could rise dramatically in Scotland. Independent research suggests that by 2030 as many as 38% of children in Scotland could be living in poverty (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Relative child poverty in Scotland, after housing costs, 1995-2017, and projections for 2020/21**



Source: Graphic produced by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in Poverty in Scotland 2018 with data from Reed, H and Stark, G. (2018) Forecasting child poverty in Scotland: a Report for the Scottish Government. Available from: <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/31454/1/00533637.pdf>

## Impact

Experiencing child poverty can have an extremely detrimental impact on the health, wellbeing and educational attainment of children. Research suggests that:

- Poverty has negative impacts on children’s health, cognitive development, social, emotional and behavioural development and educational outcomes
- Children and families living in poverty experience significant health and social inequalities
- Disadvantaged adults have an increased risk of their own children experiencing poverty<sup>5</sup>

Child poverty is also damaging and costly to the wider economy. Research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests that poverty costs the UK economy up to £78 billion a year as a result of increased spending on public services such as the NHS and education, social security, lost receipts and lost earnings.<sup>6</sup> Many of these costs are met by local authorities and their community planning partners.

## The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017

The Scottish Government introduced a Child Poverty Bill which was passed by the Scottish Parliament with unanimous support in November 2017 – and is now the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017.

The Act places a duty on the Scottish Government to significantly reduce child poverty in Scotland against four income targets by 2030.

Under the Act, **local authorities and health boards must jointly produce an annual LCPAR highlighting:**

- Action taken to date to address child poverty
- Proposed action to address child poverty

The reports should also highlight the steps that are being taken to make sure pregnant women and families can access information and advice in relation to income maximisation.

## Developing Local Child Poverty Action Reports

While many of the levers driving up child poverty are beyond local control, there is much that can be done locally to maximise income, reduce costs and mitigate the impact of living in poverty for children and families.

[Guidance](#)<sup>7</sup> published by the Scottish Government on LCPAR notes that the reports should be developed and delivered in partnership with the relevant health board. The Guidance suggests that effective reports may require collaborative working across a range of partners stating that, “In many cases it will make sense for the Community Planning Partnership process to provide a helpful vehicle to coordinate reports.”

The [Guidance](#) also states that particular consideration should be given in the reports to households at highest risk of child poverty. These include:

- large families (with 3+ children)
- families with a baby aged under one
- families in which the mother is aged 25 or less
- one parent families
- families in which someone is disabled
- ethnic minority families

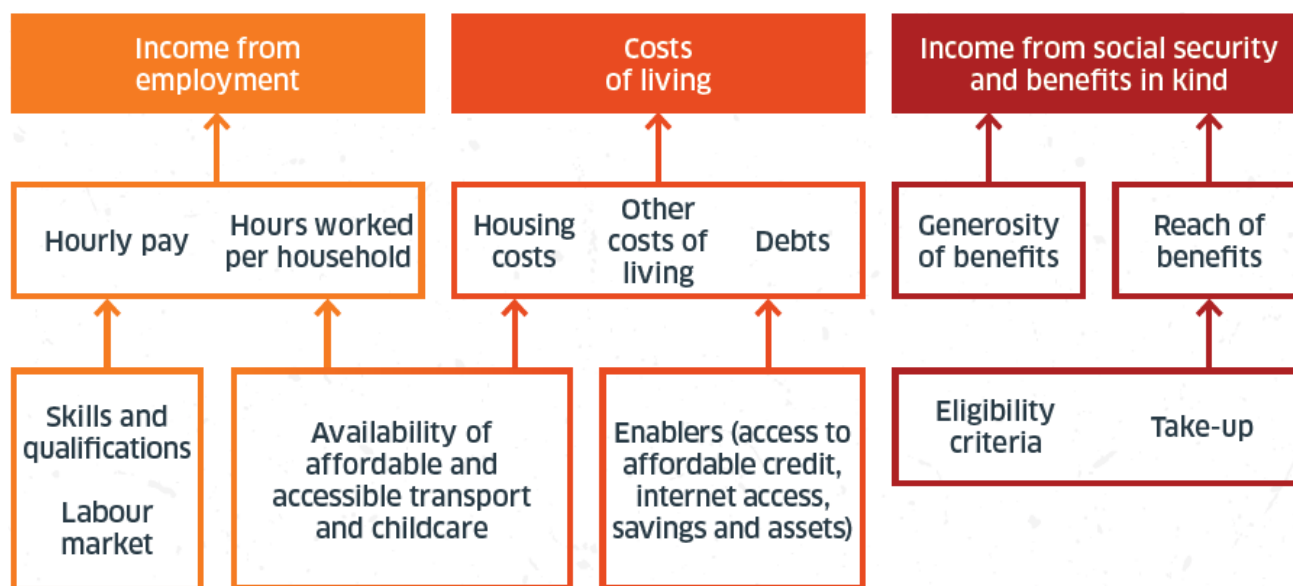
LCPARs should also be based on a strong understanding of local needs, including the barriers and opportunities for families in the local area. This might include involving local people experiencing or at risk of poverty in assessing local needs and creating policy solutions.

The Guidance is very clear that LCPARs should keep a sharp focus on the three key drivers of reduced child poverty. These are:

- Increased income from employment
- Increased income from social security and benefits in kind
- Reduced cost of living for families

Figure 2 illustrates that many of these drivers of poverty can be influenced by local actions. These include, for example, promoting the uptake of benefits and removing barriers to employment such as inaccessible and expensive childcare and transport.

**Figure 2: Key drivers of child poverty**



Source: Scottish Government (2018) Local Child Poverty Action Report: Guidance Available from: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/local-child-poverty-action-report-guidance/>

Addressing these issues will require action across a wide range of local authority and health board activities, as well as those of other community planning partners and the private sector. For example:

- **Increased income from employment**  
 Relevant work might include a review of economic development policy to ensure good quality and family friendly employment with employment opportunities and well-paid positions available for parents (potentially starting with community planning partners as employers). A recent report from the Improvement Service found that while councils are major employers in their areas, in many cases the proportion of staff from the most disadvantaged areas is disproportionately low and the associated share of salary spend in those areas is also disproportionately low.<sup>8</sup>
- **Increased income from social security and benefits in kind**  
 This might include ensuring locally administered benefits are working well, are adequate and can be easily accessed by families with children. In some areas, access to local benefits has been automated to ensure all families eligible for benefits receive them. The guidance also

highlights the importance of high quality information and advice on accessing welfare benefits and maximising household income.

- **The cost of living**

This might include actions to address the cost of living for families including, for example, increasing the supply of affordable housing to families, addressing fuel poverty and ensuring childcare provision is affordable.

For more on tackling poverty at a local level see the evidence review from [What Works Scotland](#) on action to prevent and mitigate child poverty in Community Planning Partnerships.<sup>9</sup>

Work described in LCPARs to tackle the key drivers of poverty should complement wider work taking place locally to promote the health and wellbeing of children experiencing, or at risk of, poverty that will be reported elsewhere e.g. Children's Services Plans.

LCPARs should include a review of existing action that will influence the three key drivers of poverty. They should also identify new action that will be taken forward by the local authority and health board (and potentially wider community planning partners). This will be essential in creating the 'step change' that will be required to significantly reduce child poverty across Scotland.

## Measuring and sharing progress

The LCPAR should also illustrate how the strategies, policies and practices it describes are having an impact on child poverty over time. This might include ensuring best use is being made of available local data as well as using and developing local indicators to establish where progress is being made. It will also include ensuring that the impact of policies and services is well evaluated.

Local authorities and health boards are also encouraged to share learning in relation to tackling child poverty. This might involve engagement with the networks and events organised by national partners such as the National Coordinator for Local Child Poverty Action Reports, the Scottish Government, NHS Health, COSLA and SPIRU.

# What does this mean for elected members?

Elected members have a key role in agreeing the LCPARs and ensuring the aspiration to tackle child poverty is met.

Elected members will therefore have a strong interest in finding out whether process and structures are in place to ensure that a robust, comprehensive and effective plan is developed, covering the three key drivers of child poverty.

Elected members will may also wish to consider whether any necessary resources have can made available locally to ensure LCPARs can be implemented successfully.

LCPARs are to be produced and delivered jointly with the relevant health board. Elected members should therefore have an understanding of mechanisms in place to develop the plans and at what point they will have an opportunity to scrutinise their contents and delivery.

Elected members should be aware that the duty to report on action to tackle child poverty is clearly linked with, and reflects on, wider responsibilities placed on local authorities such as:

- The Fairer Scotland Duty,<sup>10</sup> which requires public bodies to take the socio-economic impact of strategic decisions into account. When considering whether the Fairer Scotland Duty has been met in relation to strategic decisions, elected members should take the opportunity to give consideration to the implications of those decisions for children experiencing poverty.
- The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014,<sup>11</sup> which requires local authorities to report on the impact of their action in terms of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child – and to take child poverty into account in relation to Children’s Services Planning. Child poverty can undermine the realisation of children’s right in a multitude of ways.
- The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015<sup>12</sup> which – amongst other things – requires community planning partners to carry out their functions with a view to reducing inequalities of outcomes which result from socio-economic disadvantage.
- The Education (Scotland) Act 2016<sup>13</sup> which requires that education authorities must have due regard to the need to carry out school education functions in a way designed to reduce inequalities of outcome

# What does good practice look like in this area?

As outlined in the [Guidance](#) good practice includes a number of key steps.

1. Local areas are encouraged to work collaboratively with key local partners in developing their LCPARs. Achieving the targets will require the co-ordinated actions of many partners to reduce child poverty.
2. It is important that LCPARs reflect a clear understanding of the local drivers of child poverty and who in the local population is at highest risk. This may involve exploring not just the distribution of child poverty geographically, but also amongst different population groups, in particular those at high risk. It should also include exploring how different drivers, such as accessible and affordable childcare, transport, cost of housing, availability of accessible training, and of well-paid and flexible work are experienced by different groups of parents locally.
3. There is already a lot of activity underway to address child poverty locally in Scotland. Local areas are encouraged to identify these activities and to critically assess if and how they will contribute to the targets, whether they reach those at highest risk of child poverty and how they could be further improved. NHS Health Scotland has developed tools and briefings to support local areas with this process.<sup>14</sup>
4. The step above can also help to identify gaps in current practice which local areas may wish to address. Any new activities that are planned should be assessed to ensure that they are designed to reach those at highest risk; they contribute to the 3 key outcomes; they are evidence based; and they are addressing local needs.<sup>15</sup>
5. Finally to ensure that we can continue to build our understanding of what works to reduce child poverty in Scotland and to share this learning, LCPARs should all include appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.



# Key issues and questions for elected members to consider

Elected members may wish to ensure they are aware of:

- Who has responsibility for development of the LCPAR in your area;
- What arrangements are in place to allow for joint working with the health board and / or wider community planning partners in development and implementation of the LCPAR;
- What opportunities elected members will have to inform and scrutinise the development and implementation of the LCPAR;
- The extent to which local residents have been given a meaningful opportunity to feed into the development of the LCPAR;
- The extent to which measures are in place to check whether policies included in the LCPAR are having an impact over time;
- The extent to which other local commitments (such as those resulting from the Fairer Scotland duty, Education (Scotland) Act 2016, Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 are reflected in the LCPAR;
- Whether the LCPAR describes measures that constitute a 'Step-change' in the local approach to tackling child poverty.

# Summary

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 and the duty it places on local authorities and health boards to publish a LCPAR provides a unique and important opportunity to change the lives of children and families in every part of Scotland. It is an opportunity for local authorities and health boards to bring about a step-change in tackling poverty and to showcase the fantastic work that many areas are already doing to:

- Increase the income of families in the area from employment
- Increase the income of families in the area from social security social security and benefits in kind
- Reduce the cost of living for families, particularly by reducing housing costs.

# Further support and contacts

For more information on the support and information available to local partners in producing Local Child Poverty Action Reports please contact:

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Further information on child poverty can be found on NHS Health Scotland's website [www.healthscotland.scot/population-groups/children/child-poverty](http://www.healthscotland.scot/population-groups/children/child-poverty) and on the Improvement Service website [www.improvementservice.org.uk/national-coordinator-child-poverty-action-reports.html](http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/national-coordinator-child-poverty-action-reports.html).

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- 13 *Education (Scotland) Act 2016* Available at: [www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2016/8/contents/enacted](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2016/8/contents/enacted)
- 14 See [www.healthscotland.scot/child-poverty](http://www.healthscotland.scot/child-poverty)
- 15 NHS Health Scotland has developed an Outcome's Planning Tool and Case Studies of Current Practice available at [www.healthscotland.scot/child-poverty](http://www.healthscotland.scot/child-poverty)

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